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OPEN SIGHTS

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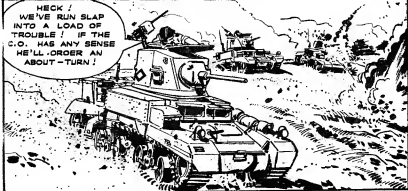


SAND, OIL FUMES, THE ACRID STENCH OF CORDITE, THE SOUND OF THEIR OWN GUNS BATTERING ON THEIR EARDRUMS... FOR THE TANKMEN FIGHTING IN NORTH AFRICA, THESE WERE AMONG THE MAJOR DISCOMFORTS... THESE AND THE LASH OF ENEMY STEEL!

Chapter 1. Unequal Combat

IN THE SUMMER OF 1942, THE DRAGOON REGIMENT TO WHICH SERGEANT DAN MASON BELONGED WAS NEW TO THOSE DISCOMFORTS.

HECK!
WE'VE RUN SLAP
INTO A LOAD OF
TROUBLE! IF THE
C.O. HAS ANY SENSE
HE'LL ORDER AN
ABOUT-TURN!



BUT SUCH AN ORDER WAS FAR FROM
THE MIND OF THE REGIMENT'S
COMMANDING OFFICER AT THAT
MOMENT...

SUNRAY TO ALL
SQUADRONS... WEAVE
YOUR WAY FORWARD AND
ENGAGE THE
ENEMY!



Open Sights

DAN MASON COULD HARDLY BELIEVE HE HAD HEARD CORRECTLY.

ENGAGE THE ENEMY?
THE OLD MAN MUST BE
OFF HIS ROCKER!



THE ENEMY MADE AN IMPRESSIVE AND FORMIDABLE SPECTACLE. IN NUMBERS THE OPPOSING FORCES WERE ABOUT EQUAL, BUT IN FIRE-POWER THERE WAS NO COMPARISON. . .

THE ENGLANDERS ARE
ASKING TO BE
ANNIHILATED, HERR
HAUPTMANN. WHAT HARM
CAN THEY DO US WITH THEIR
THIRTY-SEVEN MILLIMETRE
POPGUNS?



NO SHELLS WERE YET THREATENING THE FORMATION OF IRONCLADS WHICH HAD OPENED UP ON THE BRITISH. THEY WERE PANZERS OF THE AFRIKA KORPS, 23-TON MARK-FOURS. . .

OUR SEVENTY-FIVES WILL RIP THEM APART BEFORE THEY HAVE ANY OF US WITHIN THEIR RANGE, LEUTNANT.



OUTGUNNED, THE STUART HAD ONE OUTSTANDING FEATURE IN ITS FAVOUR. AN ADVANTAGE ON WHICH THE COLONEL OF THE BRITISH DRAGOONS WAS PREPARED TO GAMBLE DESPERATELY. . .

WEAVE, I SAID! I WANT TO SEE EVERY TANK JINKING LIKE A HARE! THAT'S HOW WE CAN OFFSET THE HEAVIER PUNCH AND LONGER REACH OF THE JERRIES!



THE IDEA BEHIND THE COLONEL'S TACTICAL MANOEUVRE WAS GOOD. IF HIS DRAGOONS HAD BEEN VETERANS, THEY MIGHT HAVE MADE IT WORK. . . BUT THIS WAS THEIR BAPTISM OF FIRE. . .

FOR PETE'S SAKE, HARLAND! CAN'T YOU MAKE THIS BATTLEWAGON ACT MORE DODGY? THROW HER AROUND A BIT. . .

I'M DOING MY BEST, SARN'T MASON.



THE REGIMENT TOOK CRUEL PUNISHMENT, TANK AFTER TANK FELL VICTIM TO THE FIRE OF THE HEAVY NAZI TANK-GUNS...

SALE OUT!
HURRY, SHE'LL
BREW UP ANY
SECOND!



THE GERMANS WERE BLASTING AWAY WITH HIGH-EXPLOSIVE AS WELL AS ARMOUR-PIERCING AMMO. MASON'S DRIVER SAW A LIEUTENANT AND TWO TROOPERS GO DOWN IN THE LURID FLASH OF AN H.E. SHELL.



Open Sights



THE REST OF THE STUARTS THAT HAD SURVIVED THE GERMANS' FIRST SALVOES WERE YAWING ONWARD. MASON DID NOT LIKE IT...

TALK ABOUT THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE! I'D GIVE A LOT TO BE GOING THE OTHER WAY...



THROUGH HIS PERISCOPE HE SAW TWO OF THE STUARTS WORK NEAR ENOUGH TO THE PANZERS TO SNAP AT THEM LIKE TERRIERS... CONTRARY TO THE NAZI'S SPECULATIONS...

THE CROSS-WIRES OF THE SIGHT ARE SPOT-ON TARGET, CAPTAIN O'BRIEN.

THEN WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? FIRE!



FOR A WEHRMACHT HAUPTMANN, THE WAR ENDED IN THE JOLTING BLAST OF A DESPISED 37-MILLIMETRE SHELL !



BUT THE TWO STUARTS WERE SWIFTLY BLUDGEONED INTO SCRAP METAL BY THE CONCENTRATED TORRENT OF GERMAN FIRE...

IT'S A MASSACRE!
THIS WHOLE
SET-UP'S AN
OUT-AND-OUT
MASSACRE!

MAYBE SO, SARGE.
BUT ALL I WANT IS A
CRACK AT THOSE
PERISHING NAZIS! IF
HARLAND CAN GET US
A SHADE CLOSER...



MASON'S GUNNER WAS DENIED HIS WISH. THE DRAGOON'S COMMANDING OFFICER COULD SEE ONLY TOO CLEARLY THAT HIS GAMBLE HAD NOT PAID OFF — AND WOULD NEVER PAY OFF NOW...

I WISH THE OLD MAN WOULD KEEP HIS HEAD DOWN! IT FAIR GIVES ME THE SHIVERS TO WATCH HIM!

HALF OF US SHOT TO BITS. IF I DON'T CALL OFF THE ADVANCE, THE REGIMENT WILL BE FINISHED. NOTHING FOR IT BUT TO RETIRE.

THE COLONEL'S ORDER CAME OVER THE AIR. MASON WAS THE FIRST MAN IN THE UNIT TO REACT!

SCARPER, HARLAND! SWING HER HARD ROUND AND STEP ON THE GAS!

AIN'T IT BETTER TO BACK OUT OF ACTION, SARN'T, AND KEEP THE FRONT OF OUR HULL FACING THE ENEMY?

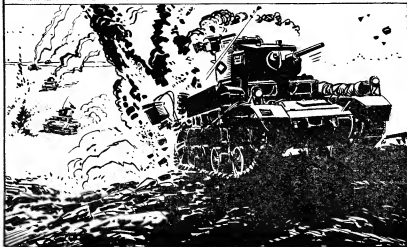


HARLAND WAS RIGHT. THE TANK'S ARMOUR PLATING WAS THICK IN FRONT, THIN AT THE BACK. BUT MASON WAS IN NO MOOD FOR A DISCUSSION ON BATTLE-DRILL...

DON'T ARGUE, HARLAND! GET TO HECK OUT OF HERE — FAST AS YOU CAN!



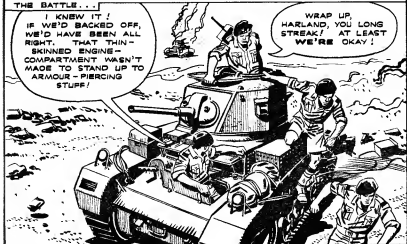
THE TANK TURNED TAIL UNDER HARLAND'S NIMBLE HANDS. IT WAS AT MAXIMUM RANGE WHEN A SHOT STRUCK IT!



AT THAT DISTANCE, THE THICKER ARMOUR AT THE FRONT OF THE HULL MIGHT HAVE STOOD UP TO THE IMPACT HAD THE TANK REVERSED FROM THE BATTLE...

I KNEW IT!
IF WE'D BACKED OFF,
WE'D HAVE BEEN ALL
RIGHT. THAT THIN-
SKINNED ENGINE-
COMPARTMENT WASN'T
MADE TO STAND UP TO
ARMOUR-PIERCING
STUFF!

WRAP UP,
HARLAND, YOU LONG
STREAK! AT LEAST
WE'RE OKAY!



DAN MASON AND HIS CREW DARTED FOR COVER... HARLAND, THE DRIVER
... BOB GLENNIE, RADIO-MAN... AND SMUDGER SMITH, THE GUNNER.

WE'VE LOST MOST OF
OUR TANKS. BUT A GOOD
MANY OF THE CREWS SEEM
TO HAVE COME OFF
LUCKY...



THE SERGEANT STOPPED SHORT AS HARLAND
SUDDENLY SPRANG TO HIS FEET...

WHAT'S
UP WITH
HIM?



NEITHER SMUDGER
NOR GLENNE KNEW
THE ANSWER, BUT
HARLAND'S PURPOSE
WAS SOON PLAIN...

TAKE IT EASY,
MISTER FARRAN!
I'LL BE RIGHT
WITH YOU!



MASON WATCHED IN ASTONISHMENT AS HARLAND HELPED A FALLEN OFFICER TO HIS FEET AND BEGAN TO HALF CARRY HIM BACK TOWARDS THEM...

WHAT'S THAT LANCE - JACK THINK HE'S DOING - TRYING TO EARN A VICTORIA CROSS?

MAYBE ALL HARLAND'S AFTER IS ANOTHER TAPES. HE SHOULD TAKE A TIP FROM ME... BOY - SOLDIER TEN YEARS AGO - SERGEANT AT THE START OF THE WAR WITHOUT HEARING A SHOT FIRED IN ANGER...

BUT SERGEANT MASON ENDED BY TALKING TO THE EMPTY AIR...

AND I GOT MY TAPES BY USING MY BONES, NOT RISKING IT...

HARLAND'S IN TROUBLE. LET'S GIVE HIM A HAND!

Open Sight

SMUDGER AND GLENNIE SCURRED FORWARD, WITH SHRAPNEL SLICING AROUND THEM, THEY HELPED FARLAND CARRY THE INJURED LIEUTENANT FARRAN BACK TO COVER.



THE WITHDRAWAL CONTINUED. WHAT WAS LEFT OF THE REGIMENT'S ARMOUR WAS LEAGUERED WITH THE SUPPLY-TRUCKS BEHIND A SCREEN OF INFANTRY.

WHAT'S THE LATEST ON MISTER FARRAN, TOSH?

THE DOC SAYS HE'LL BE OKAY IN A WEEK OR SO. CONCUSSION, THAT'S ALL. NOT LIKE THE POOR FELLERS WHO WERE WITH HIM.





Chapter 2. *Russian Front*

THE DRAGOONS WERE PULLED BACK TO AN ENCAMPMENT NEAR CAIRO. FROM THERE, SELECTED PERSONNEL WERE SENT ON A SPECIALISED COURSE....



LIEUTENANT FARRAN, DAN MASON, LANCE-CORPORAL HARLAND, BOB GLENNIE, SMUDGER SMITH — THEY WERE AMONG THOSE WHO HAD BEEN SELECTED....



THIRTY-EIGHT-AND-A-HALF-TON TANKS, UP-GUNNED FOR A SLUGGING-MATCH WITH THE AFRIKA KORPS' BEST... THESE WERE FITTING INSTRUMENTS OF VENGEANCE FOR THE EAGER DRAGONS!

BRITISH TO THE LAST RIVET, EXCEPT FOR THE SEVENTY-FIVE MILLIMETRE CANNON IN THE TURRET. THAT'S AN AMERICAN JOB. THE CO-AXIAL MACHINE-GUN AND THE HULL MACHINE-GUN ARE BOTH BESAS...



EVEN OAN MASON LOOKED WELL-SATISFIED, THOUGH HE WOULD NOT HAVE ADMITTED TO BEING EAGER FOR THE PRAY...

THAT'S MORE LIKE IT... THE ARMOUR'S A SIGHT DIFFERENT, TOO—OVER A HUNDRED MILLIMETRES THICK, INSTEAD OF THE STUARTS THIRTY OOO...



MASON SWITCHED HIS ATTENTION TO THE MAN WHO STOOD ON THE CHURCHILL'S HULL...

I WOULDN'T MIND BEING IN HIS BOOTS. CUSHY JOB, ACTING AS INSTRUCTOR...



A WEEK OR TWO LATER, THE DRAGONS ON THAT COURSE RETURNED TO THEIR UNITS. WITHIN FORTY EIGHT HOURS OF REPORTING, DAN MASON FELT LIKE A MAN WHO HAD HAD A MAGIC WAND WAVED OVER HIM...

YOU SENT FOR ME, MISTER FARRAN?

PREPARE YOURSELF FOR A BIT OF A BLOW, SERGEANT. YOU AND I ARE TO BE SECONDED FROM THE REGIMENT TO CARRY OUT INSTRUCTIONAL DUTIES!



MASON'S FACE WAS DEADPAN...BUT HE FELT LIKE WHOOPING WITH JOY...

OUR ASSIGNMENT WILL TAKE US TO RUSSIA, SERGEANT... TO A PLACE CALLED STALINGRAD...

STALINGRAD...? NEVER HEARD OF IT, SIR... IS ANYBODY ELSE GOING BESIDES YOU AND ME, MISTER FARRAN?



WE'RE TO MAKE
UP A TROOP —
FIFTEEN OF US,
ALL TOLD...



IT SEEMED A CONSIGNMENT OF THE
MODIFIED CHURCHILLS WAS BEING
DELIVERED TO SOVIET ARMY UNITS
LYING IN RESERVE, DEEP BEHIND THE
UKRAINE FRONT...

WE'LL PASS ON OUR KNOWLEDGE
TO RUSSIAN PERSONNEL. I KNOW
YOU'RE AS BRASSED OFF ABOUT
THIS AS I AM, MASON, BUT WE'LL
HAVE TO MAKE THE BEST OF IT.



FARRAN WOULD HAVE BEEN
SHOCKED IF HE HAD KNOWN
WHAT WAS PASSING THROUGH
MASON'S MIND... LATER
THAT AFTERNOON, THE
SERGEANT GRINNED BROADLY
AS HE CALLED HIS CREW
TOGETHER

I'VE GOT
NEWS FOR YOU
COVES !
GREAT NEWS !



HE TOLD THEM OF THE POSTING TO STALINGRAD, AND ROUNDED OFF HIS ACCOUNT OF IT WITH A SMUG PRONOUNCEMENT...



HARLAND AND BOB GLENNIE ECHOED SMUDGER'S SENTIMENTS. DAN MASON LOOKED AT THE THREE OF THEM PITIINGLY...

WHAT ARE YOU LOT — NUT-CASES OR SOMETHING? STAY HERE AND YOU STAND A GOOD CHANCE OF GETTING KILLED. AT STALINGRAD WE'LL BE SITTING PRETTY.

ALL WE WANT IS ANOTHER SMACK AT THE JERRIES, SARGE.



AT THAT THE SERGEANT LOST HIS TEMPER...

WELL, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO HAVE ANY PERISHIN' CHOICE, MATE. I'M PICKING YOU LOT TO GO WITH ME, AND NO ARGUMENTS...



THE MEN WHO WERE SELECTED TO GO TO RUSSIA WITH FARRAN AND MASON WERE PARADED IN THE C.O.'S TENT BEFORE LEAVING...

I APPRECIATE THAT YOU WANT TO REMAIN WITH THE REGIMENT, BUT I'M AFRAID IT'S OUT OF THE QUESTION. MY ORDERS HAVE COME FROM THE HIGHEST AUTHORITY.



SO IT WAS THAT ONE OFFICER, ONE SERGEANT AND THIRTEEN DISGRUNTLED OTHER-RANKS ENTRAINED FOR A JOURNEY WHICH WAS TO TAKE THEM THROUGH PALESTINE, SYRIA AND IRAN.

ALL ABOARD, LADS. MAKE IT SNAPPY.

LOOK ALIVE! IF YOU LOT DON'T WAKE YOUR IDEAS UP, THE RUSSKIES ARE GOING TO WISH YOU'D STAYED AT HOME!



Open Sights

FROM IRAN, THEY EMBARKED ON A 700-MILE VOYAGE NORTHWARD THROUGH THE GREAT INLAND SEA KNOWN AS THE CASPIAN...

IT'S FLAMING HOT, SIR—ABOUT AS HOT AS EGYPT.

FROM WHAT I'VE READ IT CAN BE COLD ENOUGH IN WINTER, SERGEANT—ESPECIALLY ON THE STEPPES AROUND STALINGRAD.



THEY LANDED AT ASTRAKHAN IN THE SOVIET UNION, AND WERE MET BY AN ENGLISH-SPEAKING RUSSIAN OFFICER...

LIEUTENANT KONIEFF—AT YOUR SERVICE. I AM TO ESCORT YOU TO YOUR DESTINATION.

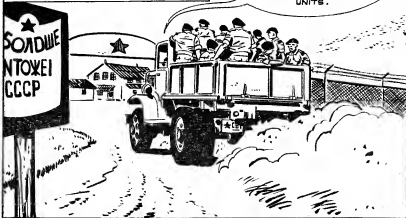


IT WAS 300 MILES BY RAIL FROM ASTRAKHAN TO STALINGRAD, WHERE A TRUCK AWAITED THEM. THEY WERE WHISKED OFF THROUGH THE CITY...



FINALLY, THEY REACHED A RED ARMY BARRACKS A HALF-HOUR'S DRIVE WEST OF STALINGRAD ACROSS A PLAIN CALLED THE DON-VOLGA STEPPE...

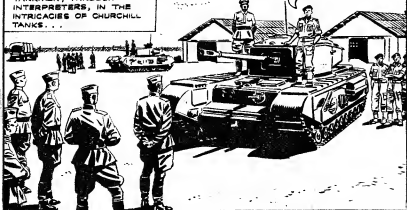
HERE WE ARE, MISTER FARRAN— THIS IS ONE OF OUR MILITARY SCHOOLS FOR THE ADVANCED TRAINING OF OFFICERS AND MEN IN ARMoured UNITS.





DURING THE NEXT FEW DAYS, THE PARTY OF DRAGOONS SETTLED DOWN TO THE BUSINESS OF INSTRUCTING REG ARMY TANKMEN, THROUGH INTERPRETERS, IN THE INTRICACIES OF CHURCHILL TANKS...

TELL YOUR MEN THEY CAN TAKE IT FROM ME, CAPTAIN, THAT THIS TANK IS THE EQUAL OF ANY PANZER I EVER CAME UP AGAINST IN NORTH AFRICA.



SERGEANT DAN MASON'S
CREW STOOD BY,
LISTENING SCORNFULLY...

THAT BIG-HEAD MASON
MAKES ME SICK! FROM THE
WAY HE TALKS ANYONE'D THINK
HE'D INVENTED PERISHIN'
TANKS!



MASON SEEMED TO ENJOY THE
SOUND OF HIS OWN VOICE...

LET ME STRESS THAT A
TANK-COMMANDER'S TASK IS
TO GET FORWARD INTO A
POSITION WHERE HE CAN
BRING DIRECT FIRE TO BEAR
ON HIS ENEMY...



SMUDGER SMITH BARELY
SUPPRESSED A SARCASTIC
LAUGH AT MASON'S WORDS...



HARK AT
HIM! SOME
PERISHIN' HERO HE
IS! MASON WOULDN'T
EVEN BE ABLE TO
FIGHT HIS WAY OUT OF
A PAPER BAG!

DAY BY DAY, WEEK BY WEEK, BATCH AFTER BATCH OF RUSSIANS WERE INITIATED INTO THE HANDLING OF CHURCHILL TANKS. TO ALL THE DRAGOONS EXCEPT DAN MASON, TEACHING THEM BECAME A MONOTONOUS CHORE...

I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH OF THIS I CAN TAKE, SERGEANT. I'M FED UP WITH THIS JOB, AND SO ARE THE REST OF THE MEN. HOW ABOUT YOU?

BEING A REGULAR, SIR, MAYBE I'M MORE USED TO MAKING THE BEST OF A BAD SITUATION...



TO HIMSELF, DAN ADMITTED THE SITUATION SUITED HIM FINE. BUT ONE SUNDAY EVENING, WHEN HE RETURNED FROM A WEEK-END FURLOUGH...

THANKS FOR THE LIFT, TOVARICH. HEY, IS THAT GUNFIRE? SORRY, CHUM, YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND ENGLISH.



NO, HE CAN'T, SERGEANT. BUT THAT IS GUNFIRE. THE GERMANS HAVE LAUNCHED AN OFFENSIVE TOWARDS THE RIVER DON.



Open Sight

EAST OF THE RIVER, HARD-PRESSED RUSSIAN INFANTRYMEN FOUGHT WITH STUBBORN VALOUR TO HOLD A BUCKLED BUT UNBROKEN DEFENCE-LINE...



YET NOTHING SEEMED TO STOP THE IMPETUS OF THE GERMAN ADVANCE...

FORWARD —
FOR FUHRER AND
FATHERLAND!



THE RUSSIANS WERE FORCED BACK...
AND BACK... TO WITHIN THIRTY MILES
OF STALINGRAD...

THE WHOLE
BATTALION IS
DIGGING-IN AS
ORDERED, MAJOR
PETROVSKI.

OUR WATCHWORD
SHOULD BE ATTACK, NOT
DEFENCE! BUT WITHOUT
THE SUPPORT OF TANKS,
HOW CAN WE HOPE TO
SUCCEED?



THE ACUTE SHORTAGE OF ARMOUR ON THE APPROACHES TO STALINGRAD
PRESENTED A DESPERATE PROBLEM NOW. ALL AVAILABLE IRONCLADS WERE
BEING FED INTO THE BATTLE...

THERE GO THE
LAST OF THE TANKS
FROM THIS SCHOOL—
EXCEPT FOR THE CHURCHILLS
WE'VE BEEN USING FOR
OUR INSTRUCTION
CLASSES.

IF THE RUSSKIES
HAD ENOUGH STAFF
HERE, THEY'D HAVE
MANNED THOSE THREE AS
WELL AND SETTLED OFF
TO THE FRONT
WITH 'EM.



Open Sights

THE DUST SETTLED BEHIND THE DEPARTING TANKS. SERGEANT MASON CAME ON THE SCENE. HE WAS TAUT WITH ANGER...

FARRAN'S OFFERED OUR SERVICES TO THE RUSSKIES— SAID WE'D CREW THE THREE TANKS LEFT HERE!



THERE WAS A BRIEF SILENCE AS THE OTHER DRAGOONS TOOK IN WHAT MASON HAD SAID. IT WAS A SILENCE BROKEN BY LANCE-CORPORAL HARLAND...

SO WHAT? WHAT?

SO WHAT? YOU AIN'T GOING TO LET HIM GET AWAY WITH IT, ARE YOU? HE'S NO RIGHT TO HAND US OVER TO THE IVANS FOR CANNON-FOODER!



HARLAND STUCK OUT HIS JAW...

YOU DO
WHAT YOU LIKE,
SERGEANT MASON, BUT
I'M READY TO FIGHT THE
PERISHING NAZIS ANY
TIME, ANYWHERE!



A DOZEN OTHER VOICES WERE
RAISED IN SUPPORT FOR THE
LANCE-JACK. DAN MASON
GLOWERED AT THEM SCOFFINGLY.

OKAY, YOU MUGS,
GET YOURSELVES WIPED
OUT! I'M GOING TO
STALINGRAD, AND I'M ASKING
TO BE REPATRIATED,
DOUBLE-QUICK!



I'M NOT
THE KIND TO
STICK OUT MY NECK
FOR ANYBODY, IF I
CAN HELP IT!
DARNED IF I'LL STICK
IT OUT FOR THE
IVANS!

THERE WAS NO SIGN OF DAN MASON WHEN LIEUTENANT FARRAN ARRIVED. IT WAS HARLAND WHO TOLD THE OFFICER OF MASON'S DECISION...

SERGEANT MASON
MAY WELL BE WITHIN HIS
RIGHTS. I'M NOT SURE I
HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO
ASK YOU BLOKES TO
BACK ME UP...

DON'T
WORRY, SIR.
WE'RE ALL
WITH YOU!



THE THREE CHURCHILLS WERE FUELLED, AND LOADED UP WITH AMMUNITION. THE 350-B.H.P. BEDFORD ENGINES CHURNED INTO LIFE...

HOLD IT,
DRIVER. WAIT FOR
LIEUTENANT KONIEFF.
HE'LL BE RIDING WITH
US AS LIAISON
OFFICER.



*H3HD
ADCTUX



KONIEFF TRAVELLED ON THE HULL OF FARRAN'S TANK. HE HAD ORDERS TO CONDUCT THE TROOP TO A BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS. FROM THERE HE WAS DIRECTED TO A BATTALION H.Q...

MAJOR
PETROVSKI?

YES, I
AM MAJOR
PETROVSKI.



KONIEFF AND PETROVSKI BEGAN TO CONVERSE HEATEOLY, ALTHOUGH THEY SPOKE IN RUSSIAN, FARRAN COULD SEE THAT SOMETHING HAD UPSET THE MAJOR.

WHY MUST I BE
SADDLED WITH THESE
BRITISH? WHY CAN I NOT
HAVE RUSSIAN-MANNED
ARMOUR TO SPEARHEAD
THIS ASSAULT?

BECAUSE THERE IS
NO RUSSIAN-MANNED ARMOUR
AT HAND. IT HAS ALL BEEN
CHANNELLED INTO OTHER
SECTORS OF THE
FRONT.



MINUTES WENT BY. AT LENGTH, KONIEFF TURNED TO FARRAN...



HE EXPLAINED THE OPERATION TO THE ENGLISHMAN. WATCHES WERE SYNCHRONISED, AND, EXACTLY HALF-AN-HOUR LATER, THE CHURCHILLS LUNGED FORWARD...



THEY CLANKED THROUGH PETROVSKI'S BATTALION AREA AND LUMBERED OUT BEYOND IT. FROM A LONG, LOW FOLD IN THE STEPPE, NARROWED EYES WATCHED THEM...

NUMBER ONE
GUN... RANGE—EIGHT
HUNDRED METRES...



THROUGH HIS VISION-SLOT, HARLAND GLIMPSED A WICKED FLASH, AND SAW A TRACER-SHELL BURNING ITS WAY THROUGH THE AIR...

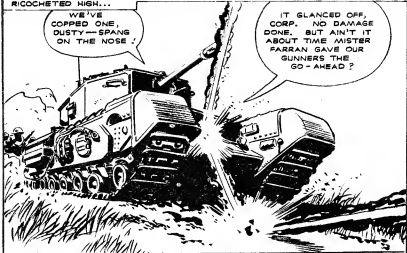
GOOD GRIEF!
IT'S COMING
STRAIGHT AT
ME!



THE FIRE BARBED SHOT DROPPED SHORT, BOUNCED, HIT THE HULL AND RICOCHETED HIGH...

WE'VE
COPPED ONE,
DUSTY—SPANG
ON THE NOSE!

IT GLANCED OFF,
CORP. NO DAMAGE
DONE. BUT AIN'T IT
ABOUT TIME MISTER
FARRAN GAVE OUR
GUNNERS THE
GO- AHEAD?



AT THAT MOMENT, LIEUTENANT FARRAN
HAD COME TO THE SAME DECISION...

OKAY, SEVENTY-FIVES!
EIGHT HUNDRED YARDS...
TARGET—ENEMY ANTI-
TANK GUNS.
FIRE!



FLAME AND STEEL WHIPPED FROM THE CHURCHILL'S GUN MUZZLES. THREE SHELLS SCREAMED ACROSS THE STEPPE. TWO MISSED BUT THE THIRD SMASHED HOME RIGHT ON TARGET!



THE GERMAN POSITION WAS SUDDENLY DAPPLIED WITH THE STAB OF HALF-A-DOZEN GUN-FLASHES. HEAVIER GERMAN GUNS HAD TAKEN UP THE BARRAGE...

DRIVERS!
JINKING TACTICS!
HALF-LEFT FOR
FIFTY YARDS...
NOW!



Open Sights

THAT WAS WHERE FARRAN MADE A TRAGIC BLUNDER. UNFAMILIAR WITH THE RUSSIAN METHOD OF ADVANCING IN COLUMN BEHIND PROTECTING-ARMOUR, HE EXPOSED THE FOLLOWING INFANTRY TO DIRECT GERMAN FIRE.



ALL ALONG THE NAZI FRONT IN THAT SECTOR OF THE BATTLE-LINE, SMALL-ARMS LASHED OUT A MURDEROUS BLIZZARD OF BULLETS. THE RED ARMY MEN FELL IN DROVES...



FARRAN QUICKLY REALISED HIS ERROR. HE TRIED TO RECTIFY IT, BUT IT WAS TOO LATE. THE RUSSIANS HAD BEEN THROWN INTO CONFUSION, THEIR ATTACK FELL OUT OF GEAR...

THEY'RE BEING
MOWN DOWN! AND
IT'S ALL MY FAULT!
ALL MY FAULT!



NUMBERS OF PETROVSKI'S MEN TRIED TO STRUGGLE ON, BUT THE DEADLY ACCURACY OF THE GERMANS' FIRE BEAT THEM. TO END THE BUTCHERY, PETROVSKI ORDERED A RETREAT...

A HUMAN
SACRIFICE! THAT'S
HOW IT HAS TURNED
OUT, KONIEFF! AND THERE
IS WHERE THE BLAME
LIES! THE
BRITISH!



FARRAN'S TROOP OF CHURCHILLS REVERSED SLOWLY WITH BESAS BLATTERING AND SEVENTY-FIVES POUNDING, IN A DESPERATE EFFORT TO COVER THE WITHDRAWAL...



BUT AS THE TANKS REACHED PETROVSKI'S LINES, THE RUSSIAN MAJOR SPLUTTERED A VITRIOLIC SPATE OF WORDS AT FARRAN...



Chapter 3. *Embattled City*

SO THE RUSSIAN COUNTER-OFFENSIVE FAILED. THE GERMANS SEIZED THE INITIATIVE AGAIN, AND BY MID-SEPTEMBER THEY WERE IN STALINGRAD...



HEAVY ARTILLERY GAVE CLOSE SUPPORT TO THE NAZI STORM-GROUPS. HOWITZER SHELLS SAVAGED THE CITY...

THEY'RE HEADING FOR THE CELLARS!
BY JIMINY! I'M PICKING A GOOD DEEP ONE FOR MYSELF!



THE LUFTWAFFE STRUCK, TOO—SEEKING TO MAKE THE TASK OF THE GERMAN GROUND-FORCES EASIER...



ATTACHED TO THE REMNANTS OF A BRIGADE WITH WHICH THEY HAD RETREATED ACROSS THE DON-VOLGA STEPPE, FARRAN AND HIS TROOP FELT THE POWER OF THE AERIAL BLITZ...

COME, MISTER FARRAN, GET YOUR MEN DOWN INTO THE CELLARS!

NO, LIEUTENANT KONIEFF, WE'LL TAKE OUR CHANCE INSIDE OUR VEHICLES.



THE STREET IN WHICH THE CHURCHILLS WERE PARKED BECAME A SHAMBLES, BUT THE TANKS SURVIVED. . .

WHAT A CLOSSERING! THERE WON'T BE ANYTHING LEFT OF STALINGRAD BUT A PILE OF RUINS BY THE TIME THE JERRIES TAKE IT, BOB. . .

IF THEY TAKE IT, SMUDGER. . .

THE BRIGADE WITH WHICH FARRAN'S TROOP WAS LINKED HAD TAKEN A WAREHOUSE AS THEIR HEADQUARTERS. THE BUILDING WAS A TOTAL WRITE-OFF WHEN THE LUFTWAFFE HAD FINISHED WITH IT. . .

LOOKS LIKE THE CELLARS STOOD UP TO THE BOMBING THOUGH.

THEY MUST HAVE DONE, MATE. BUT WHAT'S WRONG WITH LIEUTENANT KONIEFF? HE SEEMS TO BE IN A FLAP ABOUT SOMETHING.

COVERED WITH DUST, KONEFF STUMBLED THROUGH THE DEBRIS TO FARRAN'S TANK.

JUST BEFORE THE LAST BOMBS FELL, AN S.O.S. WAS RECEIVED FROM ONE OF OUR UNITS WHICH HAS BEEN SURROUNDED AND IS IN DANGER OF ANNIHILATION...



YOUR BRIGADIER WANTS ME TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT, LIEUTENANT?

YES, SPEED IS VITAL... ONLY, THIS MAY WELL PROVE TO BE A SUICIDAL MISSION.



FARRAN ANSWERED THE RUSSIAN LIEUTENANT WITH A GRIM SMILE...

LET ME WORRY ABOUT THAT, TOVARICH. WHAT DOES YOUR BRIG HAVE IN MIND?

HE SUGGESTS BREACHING THE GERMAN RING AND THEN SPEARHEADING OUR MEN OUT OF THE TRAP THEY ARE IN.



THE ENGLISHMAN NODDED. KONIEFF MOTIONED TO THE LEADING IRONCLAD.

I'LL RIDE IN THE FIRST TANK AND LET ITS DRIVER KNOW THE ROUTE... BY THE WAY, THE UNIT WHICH HAS BEEN SURROUNDED IS PETROVSKI'S. DOES THAT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE TO YOU?



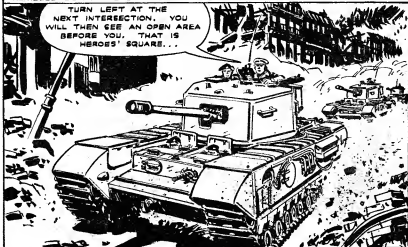
IT MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE. THE EXPRESSION ON THE BRITISH SUBALTERN'S FACE BECAME EVEN MORE GRIMLY DETERMINED!

LET'S GET CRACKING, LIEUTENANT KONIEFF! I'LL PULL MAJOR PETROVSKI AND HIS MEN OUT OF THE FIX THEY'RE IN, IF IT'S THE LAST THING I DO! I OWE THEM THAT MUCH!



THE ENGINES GROWLED. THE THREE MAMMOTHS OF MECHANISED WAR RUMBLING DOWN THE SHATTERED STREET...

TURN LEFT AT THE NEXT INTERSECTION. YOU WILL THEN SEE AN OPEN AREA BEFORE YOU. THAT IS HERODES' SQUARE...



UNKNOWN TO KONIEFF, AT THAT MOMENT, ANOTHER TRACKED VEHICLE WAS MOVING TOWARDS HERODES' SQUARE.



SOBBING UP WARILY FROM A CELLAR, ONE OF STALINGRAD'S UNDERGROUND REFUGEES SPOTTED IT. IT WAS A GERMAN STURMGESCHUTZ, A SELF-PROPELLED GUN MOUNTED ON A PANZER CHASSIS.

WHAT THE
HECK ARE THE
JERRIES UP TO?



A CASTAWAY ON THE TIDE OF WAR, DAN MASON SOON HAD THE ANSWER TO HIS QUESTION. WITHIN MINUTES, THE MOBILE GUN CLAIMED A VICTIM...



SO THAT'S
THEIR IDEA, EH?
STAY OUT OF
SIGHT AND LIE
DOGGO TILL THEY
CAN'T MISS!
DEAD - CRAFTY...



Open Sights

THE RUSSIAN LORRY,
PACKED WITH TROOPS,
WAS A TOTAL WRECK...

WIPED OUT, EVERY
ONE OF 'EM. I'D BETTER
SIT TIGHT AND KEEP OUT
OF SIGHT—OR I'LL
WIND UP THE SAME
WAY.



DAN MASON HAD BARELY MUTTERED THOSE WORDS OF COUNSEL TO HIMSELF WHEN HE HEARD THE BEAT OF ENGINES AND THE GRINDING OF CATERPILLAR TRACKS...

CHURCHILLS! MAYBE
I SHOULD NIP OUT AND
WARN THE RUSSKI IN THE
TURRET OF THAT FIRST
ONE. . . NO, BETTER NOT.
I'D BE A TARGET FOR
THE JERRIES THE
MINUTE I SHOWED
MYSELF.



THEN MASON REALISED THAT, ALTHOUGH THE MAN IN THE TURRET OF THE LEADING CHURCHILL WAS RUSSIAN, THE DRIVER AND CO-DRIVER WERE HIS OLD COMRADES...



HE WAS WATCHING FARRAN'S TROOP, THE TROOP TO WHICH HE HAD BELONGED. HE WAS WATCHING FORMER COMRADES ADVANCING TO A RENDEZVOUS WITH SUDDEN AND CERTAIN DEATH...

THE NAZIS'LL
WAIT TILL ALL THREE
CHURCHILLS ARE IN THE
SQUARE. THEN THEY'LL
BLAST 'EM IN QUICK
SUCCESSION.



AT THAT INSTANT, SOMETHING
HAPPENED TO SERGEANT DAN
MASON...

I CAN'T
JUST SKULK HERE
AND SEE THEM
SLAUGHTERED!



HE SHED THE 'OLD
SOLDIER' GUISE, AND
BECAME WHAT YEARS OF
TRAINING HAD MADE HIM
IN SPIITE OF HIMSELF—A
SOLDIER, NOTHING LESS!

KEEP
BACK, THERE!
FOR PETE'S SAKE
STAY AWAY FROM
THIS SQUARE!



MASON STARTED TO RUN FULL-PELT. HE HEARD THE FEROCIOUS CRACK OF THE ENEMY GUN. A SHELL WHIZZED PAST HIM, SCORCHINGLY...

IF THIS DON'T BEAT ALL! IT'S SAR'NT MASON!



THE GERMAN SHELL WAS NOT ON TARGET. IT SPENT ITS SAVAGE FORCE AGAINST BRICKS AND MORTAR...

DRIVERS, GET US OFF THE STREETS AND UNDER COVER! TURN INTO THE RUINS!



THE CHURCHILLS ALTERED COURSE, CRUNCHING ASIDE INTO THE WRECKAGE OF ONE OF THE THOROUGHFARE'S BATTERED BUILDINGS...



MASON JOINED THEM IN THE SHELTER OF THE OBRIS...

THERE'S A JERRY GUN TUCKED AWAY IN THE BIG DEPARTMENT-STORE, SIR. YOU'LL HAVE TO GIVE THE SQUARE A WIDE BERTH, MISTER FARRAN.



LIEUTENANT KONIEFF CHIPPED IN BLUNTLY...

IF WE ARE TO RESCUE PETROVSKI
AND HIS MEN, WE CANNOT GIVE
HEROES' SQUARE A WIDE BERTH! WE
MUST CROSS IT TO REACH
THEM!



FARRAN LOOKED AT KONIEFF, GAVE A BRISK NOD, THEN SWITCHED HIS
ATTENTION TO MASON AGAIN...

NO TIME TO
EXPLAIN, SERGEANT,
BUT IT'S GOT TO BE
HEROES' SQUARE...

ALL RIGHT, SIR,
JUST GIVE ME A FEW
MINUTES. I THINK I
CAN STOP THAT GUN
FROM BREATHING
DOWN YOUR NECKS...



Open Sights

DAN MASON HEFTED THE SUB-MACHINE-GUN HE HAD GRABBED. HE FELT STRANGELY EXALTED. . . YET, DEEP DOWN, HE WAS CONSCIOUS OF A LINGERING SENSE OF SHAME, TOO. . .

WAIT, SERGEANT. SOME OF US HAD BETTER GO WITH YOU.

ONE MAN'LL RUN LESS RISK OF DRAWING FIRE THAN A PARTY, SIR. BESIDES, I'VE A NASTY TASTE TO WASH OUT OF MY MOUTH FOR SLOPING OFF LIKE I DID. . .



HE DISAPPEARED AMID THE RUBBLE. ALONE, HE WORKED HIS WAY ROUND HEROES' SQUARE. HE WAS ALMOST IN POSITION WHEN LUCK DESERTED HIM. . . HE SLIPPED ON THE TREACHEROUS RUBBLE. . .

SUFFERING WILDCATS!



ALERTED, THE GERMAN ARTILLERYMEN DIVED BACK FROM THEIR GUN, SMALL ARMS IN THEIR HANDS. A STREAM OF SCHMEISSER BULLETS PECKED AT THE DUST CLOSE TO MASON.



MASON HAD NO CHANCE TO DIVE FOR COVER IN THAT WITHERING HOT SPOT OF CONCENTRATED FIRE...



DAN'S BODY JERKED AS THE NAZI BULLETS STRUCK HIM. SOMEHOW, HE BROUGHT HIS OWN GUN INTO PLAY, HOISING THE GERMANS WITH A STREAM OF LEAD...



FROM ACROSS THE SQUARE, FARRAN'S TROOP HEARD THE SERGEANT SHOUTING THAT THE WAY WAS CLEAR. HIS VOICE SOUNDED STRONG ENOUGH, BUT HE COULD HARDLY RAISE A WHISPER WHEN FARRAN FOUND HIM...





IT WAS CLEAR SERGEANT MASON HAD NOT GOT LONG TO GO, BUT A GHOST OF A SMILE CROSSED HIS FACE...

WHEN THE JERRIES HIT STALINGRAD, THE RUSSKIES FORGOT ME... AND I'M GLAD THEY DID... I AIN'T SORRY IT'S ENDING LIKE... LIKE THIS...



THE SERGEANT SLUMPED. STIFF-BACKED, LIEUTENANT FARRAN WALKED BACK TO THE TANKS...

LEAD ON, LIEUTENANT KONEFF. THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO FOR THE SERGEANT. HE'S DEAD...



THE CHURCHILLS LUMBERED FORWARD AGAIN, TO ENCOUNTER THE FIRE OF ENEMY INFANTRY FROM A BROAD BOULEVARD...

BASH THROUGH! GUNNERS AND MACHINE-GUNNERS, GIVE 'EM THE FULL TREATMENT!



THE TANKS' BESAS AND SEVENTY-FIVES OPENED UP. THE GREY-CLAD FIGURES IN FRONT OF THEM WILTED UNDER A STORM OF LEAD AND STEEL. BUT THERE WAS DANGER ABOVE...



FARRAN'S BULLET DRILLED A WEHRMACHT CORPORAL AS HE WAS ABOUT TO LET FLY WITH A STICK-GRENADE. THERE WERE OTHER NAZIS READY TO THROW...



THE THREE IRONCLADS RAN THE GAUNTLET OF A DELUGE OF HAND-BOMBS...



Open Sight

THE TRACKS SUFFERED NO DAMAGE. FARTHER ALONG THE BOULEVARD, FARRAN AND HIS PARTY MET THE REMNANTS OF PETROVSKI'S UNIT...



PETROVSKI EYED THE RESCUERS UNCERTAINLY. IT WAS PLAIN HE HAD LITTLE FAITH IN THEM. HE AGREED TO FARRAN'S PROPOSALS BROODINGLY...

COVER THE UPPER WINDOWS, GUNNERS, AND SHOOT AT ANY SIGN OF MOVEMENT!



BUT BEFORE LONG, PETROVSKI HAD CAUSE TO REVISE HIS OPINIONS...



MY MEN COULD NEVER HAVE FOUGHT THEIR WAY OUT OF THIS RING. IT LOOKS AS IF THE BRITISHERS WILL GET US THROUGH...



BACK AT THE CHURCHILLS' START POINT, KONIEFF TRANSLATED A BEAMING SPEECH MADE BY PETROVSKI.

THE MAJOR WISHES TO EXTEND HIS WARMEST THANKS TO YOU AND YOUR CREWS. HE HOPES THAT ONE DAY IN THE FUTURE, YOU AND HE WILL BE ABLE TO CELEBRATE THE OCCASION TOGETHER...

TELL THE MAJOR IT'S A DATE.

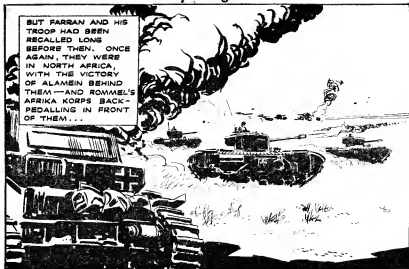


THAT WAS A DATE FARRAN COULD NOT KEEP. STALINGRAD WAS RELIEVED ONLY WHEN RUSSIAN COUNTER-BLOWS AND WINTER'S ICY GRIP COMBINED TO DESTROY THE MORALE OF THE CITY'S INVADERS.

IT IS A WHOLESALE SURRENDER... THE END OF A GERMAN FORMATION THAT WAS ORIGINALLY HALF-A-MILLION STRONG!



BUT FARRAN AND HIS TROOP HAD BEEN RECALLED LONG BEFORE THEN. ONCE AGAIN, THEY WERE IN NORTH AFRICA, WITH THE VICTORY OF ALAMEIN BEHIND THEM—AND ROMMEL'S AFRIKA KORPS BACK-PEDALLING IN FRONT OF THEM...



ONLY ONE OF THE BRITISH DRAGOON TROOP REMAINED IN STALINGRAD WHEN THE RAVAGED CITY WAS RECLAIMED BY ITS RIGHTFUL OWNERS...



DAN MASON RESTED WHERE HE HAD FALLEN...

MAYBE DAN MASON WAS THERE IN SPIRIT, TOO — WATCHING THAT SHIVERING, SHUFFLING, BLEARY-EYED FAMISHED RABBLE...



MEN WHO HAD ONCE GOOSE-STEPPED ARROGANTLY WERE NOW A WOE-BEGONE VANGUARD ON THE LONE ROAD OF DEFEAT AND DISASTER DOWN WHICH THE NAZIS WERE TO DRAG THE WHOLE GERMAN NATION...

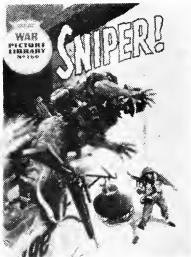
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